

Toronto

Ontario vowed to investigate horrific deaths in long-term care. Now it says that didn't happen

NDP calling on provincial police to investigate cases where seniors died of dehydration

[Shanifa Nasser](#) · CBC News · Posted: May 06, 2021 1:33 PM ET | Last Updated: May 6



Cathy Parkes, whose father, Paul Parkes, died of COVID-19 last year while living at Orchard Villa Retirement Community, is pictured near her home in Pickering, Ont., on Thursday. (Evan Mitsui/CBC)

The day before Cathy Parkes's father died, she went to see him through the window of his Pickering, Ont., long-term care home.

Paul Parkes, 86, had been suffering from a urinary tract infection and wasn't getting enough water.

A personal support worker said he wouldn't take fluids. Cathy asked if her father could be sent to hospital. She says the home refused.

"I saw what he looked like in his casket when we had the viewing and he was a completely different man than what I had seen just weeks before," she told CBC News.

Parkes died in April of last year, and Cathy dove into advocacy — she says it's been a way to make sure her father's death wasn't in vain, but it's also stopped her from fully grieving. On behalf of about 250 others whose lives have been affected by a death there, she now awaits the results of a police investigation into the Orchard Villa home.

"We just want the truth," she said.



Crosses representing residents who died of COVID-19 are pictured on the lawn of Camilla Care Community, in Mississauga, Ont., on Jan. 13, 2020. (Evan Mitsui/CBC)

'There's going to be justice', Ford promised

"If I had had my father living at home with me and I didn't feed him and I didn't give him water and I didn't give him medication or send him to the hospital, I would be criminally charged," she said.

"So I don't know why when these things to residents of long-term care, we look the other way."

The truth is what the Ontario government had promised one year ago in the wake of a disturbing Canadian Armed Forces report into five of the province's long-term care facilities, whose findings prompted widespread public outcry.

Nearly one year ago, as that first detailed picture emerged of the true scale of the horror faced by residents of Ontario's long-term care system during the pandemic, a visibly emotional Premier Doug Ford vowed: "There's going to be justice."

Patients with ulcers with soiled sheets left bed-bound as COVID-19 tore through homes, dehydration, cockroaches and staff moving unit to unit in contaminated gear — those were just some of the unsettling images contained the report.

In the face of it all, the premier vowed a full investigation, with the details to be turned over to police who could lay criminal charges if warranted.

"The government has already begun an active investigation," the province said in a news release last May.

Now, it turns out, that didn't happen.

During a news conference Wednesday, Solicitor General Sylvia Jones told reporters, in response to question by a QP Briefing reporter: "Investigations would not happen at a provincial level or a ministry level."

"They would be the purview and the responsibility of either the local police departments or in some cases, they would refer it to another division, another police operation."

In its news release announcing an investigation last year, the province said one death had been referred to Office of the Chief Coroner for investigation. "Specific critical incidents" in the report were referred to the Ministry of Long-Term Care's inspections branch.

WATCH / Jones answers questions about investigation:



Ontario's Solicitor General says investigations 'would not happen at a provincial level'

4 months ago | 1:10

During a news conference Wednesday, Solicitor General Sylvia Jones was asked about the status of the investigation that Ontario said in a news release it had "already begun" last May. Jones says the province would not have conducted an investigation. 1:10

In a statement Thursday, a spokesperson for Jones said it was the deputy solicitor general who provided the report to the coroner's office.

"Should there be any criminal concerns during a death investigation, the coroner would bring them to the attention of the police. The Office of the Chief Coroner does not have the authority to lay criminal charges," said spokesperson Stephen Warner.

Speaking in the Legislature on Thursday, Minister of Long-Term Care Merrilee Fullerton said homes were subject investigation by individual inspectors.

"Each home was inspected by two or more inspectors ... Had inspectors found potentially criminal conduct, they would have passed that information on to the police."

'They died when all they needed was water and a wipe down'

In a letter to Ontario Provincial Police Commissioner Thomas Carrique Thursday, Opposition Leader Andrea Horwath called on the police force to "evaluate" whether instances of lack of water and personal care documented by armed forces and the Long-Term Care COVID-19 Commission "constitute a case for criminal charges."

"As I read of 26 seniors perishing not from COVID-19 but from a lack of water and personal care, my heart broke. I thought we had heard the worst of things, but I was wrong," the NDP's Horwath wrote. "I entrust your force to make a thorough evaluation, and to lay charges where necessary," she said.

The commission, which unveiled its [final 322-page report](#) Friday night, said that by the time the armed forces arrived at the homes identified as most in need of attention, "they found deplorable conditions."

"It was noted by ACCT [augmented civilian care team] that 26 residents died due to dehydration prior to the arrival of the CAF team due to the lack of staff to care for them," the report quotes one member as saying.

"They died when all they needed was 'water and a wipe down.'"

WATCH / Long-term care minister responds to report:



CBC News asks if Ontario long-term care minister will apologize after COVID-19 Commission releases scathing report

4 months ago | 3:25

During a press conference Monday, CBC News Queen's Park reporter Mike Crawley asked Ontario's Minister of Long-term Care Merrilee Fullerton if she or her government would apologize for the crisis in long-term care facilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. This was her response. 3:25

OPP not currently investigating

But as of Thursday, OPP spokesperson Bill Dickson told CBC News he wasn't aware of any ongoing investigations into deaths at nursing homes in the province related to COVID-19.

Durham Regional Police Services spokesperson George Tudos confirmed an investigation is happening in that region but declined a request for an interview.

"We are reviewing the details of the Ontario's Long-Term Care COVID-9 Commission report released on April 30, 2021 and this remains an ongoing investigation. We don't have anything further to add at this point," he said.

Parkes says she's been told by police an update should be available next week. What that might be, she hasn't been told.

The commission concluded Ontario had no plan to protect long-term care residents amid the pandemic, citing chronic underfunding, staffing shortages and poor oversight.

- [Ford faces blowback after military report reveals 'horrific' conditions at Ontario long-term care homes](#)
- [Ontario's long-term care sector wasn't ready or equipped for COVID-19: report](#)

- [**Ontario had no plan to address pandemic or protect residents in long-term care, final commission report says**](#)

The commissioners also said Dr. David Williams, the province's chief medical officer of health, in particular, was too slow to act on emerging information about COVID-19.

Workers in the long-term care sector were described making personal protective equipment out of "pop bottles and plastic bags" because regular masks were in such short supply.

Earlier Friday, Ford said he welcomed the commission's report, as difficult as it would be to read.

"What happened in our long-term care homes, it was tragic," he said. "And it was terrible. But most of all, it can never be allowed to happen again."

WATCH / Ford calls findings 'gut-wrenching':



Ontario premier calls military report on long-term care homes 'heartbreaking' and 'gut-wrenching'

1 year ago | 1:26

Doug Ford promises accountability and justice after the report describes 'extremely troubling' conditions in the homes. 1:26

For now, Parkes waits for accountability in her father's death and those of so many others who died in a place where they expected to receive care.

She's grown tired of the political sound bites, she says, and what she describes a lack of tangible action.

"If you say you're going to do something and you're crying on television about how it affects you, let's see some action. And that's been the problem all along, a lot of words and no action," she said.

Until then, she says: "It's a wound that never gets to close."

- **CBC INVESTIGATES** [Nursing home told families hospital wouldn't accept sick residents during pandemic. That wasn't true](#)

With files from Lorenda Reddekopp and The Canadian Press



Coronavirus Brief

Your daily guide to the coronavirus outbreak. Get the latest news, tips on prevention and your coronavirus questions answered every evening.

Email address:

Subscribe

©2021 CBC/Radio-Canada. All rights reserved.

Visitez Radio-Canada.ca